

AT A GLANCE



AFP, Paris

Factfiles on the eight teams taking part in the 2003 Confederations Cup which starts on Wednesday:

GROUP A

FRANCE
Coach: Jacques Santini
Captain: Marcel Desailly
Form: *World Cup winners - 1998*
European Championship winners - 1984, 2000
Confederations Cup winners - 2001
Olympic Games - gold medalists 1984

FIFA ranking: 2nd
SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Fabien Barthez (Manchester United/ENG), Gregory Coupet (Lyon), Mickael Landreau (Nantes)

Defenders: William Gallas (Chelsea/ENG), Marcel Desailly (Chelsea/ENG) Bixente Lizarazu (Bayern Munich/GER), Philippe Mexes (Auxerre), Willy Sagnol (Bayern Munich/GER), Mikaël Silvestre (Manchester United/ENG), Lilian Thuram (Juventus Turin/ITA), Jean-Alain Boumsong (Auxerre)

Midfielders: Benoit Pedretti (Sochaux), Robert Pires (Arsenal/ENG), Jerome Rothen (Monaco), Olivier Dacourt (AS Rome/ITA), Olivier Kapo (Auxerre), Ludovic Giuly (Monaco), Sylvain Wiltord (Arsenal/ENG), Ousmane Dabo (Atalanta Bergamo/ITA)

Strikers: Djibril Cisse (Auxerre), Sidney Govou (Lyon), Thierry Henry (Arsenal/ENG), Steve Marlet (Fulham/ENG)

JAPAN
Coach: Zico
Captain: Hidetoshi Nakata
Form:

World Cup - two appearances in 1998 and 2002 when they reached the second round
Asian Cup: winners in 1992 and 2000

Confederations Cup: 2001 finalists
FIFA ranking: 23rd

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Yoshikatsu Kawaguchi (Portsmouth/ENG), Seigo Narazaki (Nagoya Grampus Eight), Hitoshi Sogahata (Kashima Antlers)

Defenders: Yutaka Akita (Kashima), Akira Narahashi (Kashima), Toshihiro Hattori (Jubilo Iwata), Nobuhisa Yamada (Urawa Red Diamonds), Ryuzo Morioka (Shimizu S-Pulse), Tsuneyasu Miyamoto (Gamba Osaka), Keisuke Tsuboi (Urawa)

Midfielders: Daisuke Oku (Yokohama Marinos), Takashi Fukunishi (Iwata), Hidetoshi Nakata (Parma/ITA), Alessandro Santos (Shimizu), Shunsuke Nakamura (Reggina/ITA), Mitsuo Ogasawara (Kashima), Koji Nakata (Kashima), Junichi Inamoto (Fulham/ENG), Yasuhito Endo (Osaka)

Forwards: Masashi Nakayama (Iwata), Takayuki Suzuki (Genk/BEL), Yuichiro Nagai (Urawa), Naohiro Takahara (Hamburg/GER)

COLOMBIA
Coach: Francisco Maturana
Captain: Ivan Cordoba
Form:

World Cup - four appearances, best result in 1990 when they made it into the second round
Copa America - winners in 2001

FIFA ranking: 39th

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Oscar Cordoba (Besiktas/TUR), Juan Carlos Henao (Once Caldas), Luis Martinez (Envigado)

Defenders: Ivan Cordoba (Inter Milan/ITA), Mario Yepes (Nantes/FRA), Gerardo Bedoya (Racing Club/ARG), Gonzalo Martinez (Naples/ITA), Edgar Ramos (Santa Fe), Jose Mera (Deportivo Cali), Gerardo Vallejo (Deportivo Cali), Andres Mosquera (Deportivo Cali)

Midfielders: Jorge Lopez (Millonarios), Arnulfo Valentierra (Once Caldas), Ruben Velasquez (Once Caldas), Oscar Diaz (Deportivo Cali), Giovanni Hernandez (Deportivo Cali), Elkin Murillo (Deportivo Cali), Jairo Patino (Deportivo Cali)

Strikers: Victor Aristizabal (Cruzeiro/BRA), Eudalio Arriaga

(Junior), Martin Arzuaga (Junior), Herly Alcazar (Centaurus), Elson Becerra (Tolima)

NEW ZEALAND
Coach: Mick Waitt
Captain: Chris Zoricich
Form:

World Cup - one appearance in 1982, beaten in first round
Oceania Cup - winners in 1998 and 2002

FIFA ranking: 51st

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Jason Batty (Caversham), Mike Utting (Kingz), Mark Paston (Napier City Rovers)

Defenders: Duncan Oughton (Columbus Crew), David Mulligan (Barnsley/NZL), Chris Zoricich (Newcastle United/AUS), Danny Hay (Walsall/ENG), Gavin Wilkinson (Portland Timbers), Ryan Nelsen (Washington DC Utd/USA), Scott Smith (Kingstonian), Gerard Davis (Tampere Utd), Noah Hickey (Tampere Utd)

Midfielders: Ivan Vicelich (Roda JC/NED), Aaran Lines (Ruch Chorzow), Mark Burton (Kingz), Chris Jackson (Kingz), Raf De Gregorio (Kingz), Simon Elliott (Los Angeles Galaxy/AUS), Michael Wilson (Stanford University/USA)

Strikers: Chris Killen (Oldham Athletic/ENG), Chris Bouckenoghe (Ronse), Shane Smeltz (Adelaide City Force/AUS), Vaughan Coveny (South Melbourne/AUS)

GROUP B

BRAZIL
Coach: Carlos Alberto Parreira
Captain: Emerson
Form:

World Cup winners - 1958, 1962, 1970, 1994, 2002
Copa America winners - 1919, 1922, 1949, 1989, 1997, 1999
Confederations Cup winners - 1997

FIFA ranking: 1st

SQUAD

Goalkeeper: Dida (AC Milan/ITA), Fabio (Vasco da Gama), Julio Cesar (Flamengo)

Defenders: Bellotti (Villarreal/SPA), Fabio Aurelio (Valencia/SPA), Juan (Bayer Leverkusen/GER), Lucio (Bayer Leverkusen/GER), Fabio Luciano (Corinthians), Edu Dracena (Cruzeiro), Maurinho (Cruzeiro), Kleber (Corinthians)

Midfielders: Eduardo Costa (Bordeaux/FRA), Emerson (AS Roma/ITA), Adriano (Atletico Paranaense), Alex (Cruzeiro), Dudu (Vitoria), Kleberson (Atletico Paranaense), Ricardinho (Sao Paulo)

Strikers: Ronaldinho (Paris Saint Germain/FRA), Adriano (Parma/ITA), Gil (Corinthians), Luiz Fabiano (Sao Paulo), Ilan (Atletico Paranaense)

TURKEY
Coach: Senol Gunes
Captain: Rustu (probable)
Form:

World Cup - two appearances, best result third in 2002
European Championships - quarter-finalists in 2000

FIFA ranking: 8th

SQUAD

Keepers: Rustu Recber (Fenerbahce), Omer Catik (Gaziantepspor), Murat Sahin (Adanaspor)

Defenders: Fatih Sonkaya (Roda Kerkrade/NED), Bulent Korkmaz (Galatasaray), Fatih Akyel (Fenerbahce), Alpay Ozalan (Aston Villa/ENG), Ahmet Yildirim (Besiktas), Deniz Baris (Genclerbirligi), Ibrahim Uzulmez (Besiktas), Servet Cetin (Denizlispor)

Midfielders: Ergun Penbe (Galatasaray), Tayfun Korkut (Real Sociedad/SPA), Volkan Arslan (Galatasaray), Yildiray Basturk (Bayer Leverkusen/GER), Selcuk Sahin (Istanbulspor), Ibrahim Toraman (Gaziantepspor), Gokdeniz Karadeniz (Trabzonspor)

Strikers: Tuncay Sanli (Fenerbahce), Nihat Kahveci (Real Sociedad/SPA), Okan Yilmaz (Bursaspor), Huseyin Kartal (Ankaragucu), Necati Ates (Adanaspor)

UNITED STATES
Coach: Bruce Arena
Captain: yet to be named
Form:

World Cup - seven appearances, best results semi-finalists in 1930 and quarter-finalists in 2002
Confederations Cup - third in 1992 and 1999

CONCACAF Cup - winners in 1991 and 2002
FIFA ranking: 10th

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Joe Cannon (Lens/FRA), Marcus Hahnmann (Reading/ENG), Tim Howard (New Jersey)

Defenders: Greg Vanney (Bastia/FRA), Gregg Berhalter (Cottbus/GER), Carlos Bocanegra (Chicago), Dan Califf (Los Angeles), Steve Cherundolo (Hannover/GER), Eddie Pope (New Jersey), Pablo Mastroeni (Colorado)

Midfielders: Chris Armas (Chicago), Bobby Convey (DC United), Chris Klein (Kansas City), Eddie Lewis (Preston/ENG), Kyle Martino (Columbus), Frankie Hejduk (Columbus)

Strikers: DaMarcus Beasley (Chicago), Jeff Cunningham (Columbus), Landon Donovan (San Jose), Jovan Kirovski (Birmingham/ENG), Earnie Stewart (DC United), Clint Mathis (New Jersey), Taylor Twellman (New England)

CAMEROON

Coach: Winfried Schaefer
Captain: Rigobert Song
Form:

World Cup - five appearances, best result quarter-finalists in 1990
African Nations Cup - winners in 1984, 1988, 2000 and 2002
Olympic Games - gold medalists in 2000

FIFA ranking: 18th

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Idriss Carlos Kameni (Le Havre/FRA), Andre Eboue, Eric Kwekeu (Bamboutos Mbouda)

Defenders: Rigobert Song (Lens/FRA), Bill Tchato (Kaiserslautern/GER), Thimothee Atouba (FC Basel/SWI), Perrier Ndoube, Bahoken Gustave, Lucien Mettomo (Manchester City/ENG), Pierre Djanka

Midfielders: Marc-Vivien Foe (Manchester City/ENG), Geremi (Real Madrid/SPA), Eric Djemba (FC Nantes/FRA), Modeste Mbami (Sedan/FRA), Salomon Olembe (Marseille/FRA), Idrissou Mohamed (Hanover/GER), Joel Epalle, Valery Mezague (Montpellier/FRA), Achille Emana (Toulouse/FRA)

Strikers: Samuel Eto'o (Real Mallorca/SPA), Joseph Desire Job (Middlesbrough/ENG), Pius Ndiefi (Sedan/FRA), Parfait Ngon Adjam (Canon Yaounde)

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Coming up against the likes of World Cup winners Brazil, Turkey and the United States will be a different ball game altogether, a task made even more difficult without their midfield general Zinedine Zidane.

Arsenal midfielder Robert Pires, speaking from France's base camp at Clairefontaine, stressed: "We've got a title to defend - the image of France is at stake."

Pires, missing from the World Cup debacle with a knee injury, added: "This isn't really a dress

FIXTURES

1ST ROUND

Wednesday, June 18
New Zealand v Japan (Stade de France, Paris 1600GMT)
France v Colombia (Lyon 1900GMT)

Thursday, June 19
Turkey v United States (Saint Etienne 1700GMT)
Brazil v Cameroon (Stade de France, Paris 1900GMT)

Friday, June 20
Colombia v New Zealand (Lyon 1700GMT)
France v Japan (Saint Etienne 1900GMT)

Saturday, June 21
Cameroon v Turkey (Stade de France, Paris 1700GMT)
Brazil v United States (Lyon 1900GMT)

Sunday, June 22
France v New Zealand (Stade de France, Paris 1900GMT)
Japan v Colombia (Saint Etienne 1900GMT)

Monday, June 23
Brazil v Turkey (Saint Etienne - 1900GMT)
United States v Cameroon (Lyon 1900GMT)

SEMI-FINALS

Thursday, June 26
Leader Group B v runner-up Group A (Lyon 1600GMT)
Leader Group A v runner-up Group B (Stade de France, Paris 1900GMT)

3RD-PLACE PLAY-OFF

Saturday, June 28 (Saint Etienne 1600GMT)

FINAL

Sunday, June 29 (Stade de France, Paris 1900GMT)



PHOTO: AFP

TIME FOR SOME SHOPPING! Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira looks for electronic devices at a store in the Champs Elysee avenue in Paris on June 15.

Hosts' point to prove



AFP, Paris

The 2003 Confederations Cup represents the first real test for hosts France to prove to the world that they have recovered from their pitiful showing at last year's World Cup.

A first round exit in Asia without a single goal scored was nothing short of a humiliating disaster for the 1998 champions, resulting in a considered clear out of the old guard by new coach Jacques Santini on the return home.

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Arsenal midfielder Robert Pires, speaking from France's base camp at Clairefontaine, stressed: "We've got a title to defend - the image of France is at stake."

Pires, missing from the World Cup debacle with a knee injury, added: "This isn't really a dress

rehearsal for the European Championship, but it will give us a chance to get to know each other well and cement as a group."

Santini for his part reflected: "With 'Zizou' (Zidane) missing it'll give others the chance of a game - it's up to them to seize the opportunity."

"This Cup is being held between two stages of qualification (for Euro 2004), but it's an important objective for 'Les Bleus'," added the former Lyon coach.

"Because of the overloaded fixture list there are no more tournaments - as a result it's going to be useful for us."

France, who beat South Korea in the 2001 final, are drawn in Group A against Japan, Colombia their first opponents and outsiders New Zealand.

Group B is headed by a Brazil squad virtually unrecognisable from the one that triumphed over Germany in the World Cup last year.

Coach Carlos Alberto Parreira has called up seven new caps as he makes do without World Footballer of the Year Ronaldo, who like teammate Roberto Carlos is being held on by his club Real Madrid.

AC Milan midfielder Rivaldo is also an absentee but one major force he can rely on is Ronaldinho who will surely be as busy off the pitch as on as the Paris Saint Germain striker seeks to find a new home for next season.

But the sought-after star refuses to be distracted by all the transfer speculation.

He said: "I'm not thinking about an eventual transfer, I'm here to help my team."

Getting on the nerves



AFP, Paris

The Confederations Cup is hopefully a thick-skinned individual for if not it is likely to be feeling a little sore after all the insults hurled at it over the past year.

France's World Cup winning captain Didier Deschamps has attacked the competition which starts in France on Wednesday as an "aberration" on an already creaking fixture list.

Europe's key clubs have all dismissed it as "superfluous".

Deschamps' main gripe is that the Confederations Cup places an unnecessary extra burden on players' fitness.

The Monaco coach said: "This Confederations Cup is an aberration. It's an event which attacks the physical integrity of players, they won't have time to recover."

"We (the French league) start on August 2. France get together on June 11, and we finish the season on May 24: that doesn't leave a lot of time to recuperate."

Deschamps' comments mirror the opinion from the G14 group of Europe's top teams.

G14 director general Thomas Kurth explained: "We're opposed to this competition. We've tried to be conciliatory, constructive, to find a solution. Otherwise we'll have to scale down competitions across the board."

He added: "Clubs are lending their players, but they don't get anything in return."

"Do the sums yourself - a major player costs his club between 4,000 and 5,000 euros a day."

Even France coach Jacques Santini got in on the act, urging FIFA last year to come up with new dates to better fit in with the congested European fixture list.

"We must find a different format. Couldn't we find different dates, or even change the format completely

Primera Liga

It's in Real's hands now



Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid opened up a two-point lead at the top of the Spanish league with an emphatic 4-0 win at local rivals Atletico Madrid on Sunday to send the race for the title into a nail-biting final weekend.

The championship will be decided next week after Real Sociedad, who started Sunday in top spot, went down 3-2 at Celta Vigo.

Real Madrid, who now have 75 points from 37 games, entertain Athletic Bilbao next week, while Real Sociedad are at home to Atletico in their final game.

The Madrid players could not hide their jubilation at finding themselves in the driving seat on the road to their 29th title.

"We haven't won the title yet but we've certainly got the wind behind us now," said a beaming Ronaldo, who scored two of Real's goals.

Real coach Vicente Del Bosque, however, urged his men not to get carried away.

"Everything is still up in the air. Athletic have everything to play for next weekend because they have the UEFA Cup in their sights but the positive thing is that we are now in front of Sociedad."

Sunday's victory may just decide Del Bosque's future.

Earlier in the week, Del Bosque hinted that he might not sign a new contract at the end of the season and stand down, but if he lifts his second Spanish league title in four years, Real may find themselves making an offer he can't refuse.

The deluge at Atletico started early with Ronaldo opening the scoring after just three minutes sending a Zinedine Zidane pass home with a spectacular left-foot shot through the near post.

After 19 minutes, Raul fired home a Luis Figo cross and Ronaldo added his second - his 21st of the season - 12 minutes later with a simple tap in on the goal line from an inch-perfect pass from his Brazilian teammate Roberto Carlos.

Raul added Real's fourth 17 minutes from time, scoring from a Zinedine Zidane free kick.

Celta secured their place in next season's Champions League thanks principally to their Russian international midfielder Alexander Mostovoi.

Mostovoi's shot from the edge of the area after nine minutes, which took a slight deflection of his colleague Edu, put Celta ahead and they never looked back.

Edu provided the service for Mostovoi's second goal just after the break although the Basques looked as though they were coming back into the game midway through the second half and reduced the gap with a goal from

Nihat Kahveci.

Celta responded to the threat and Mido put them 3-1 ahead after 70 minutes to almost kill the game as a contest.

Nihat scored his second goal eight minutes from time to set in motion a frantic final few minutes as Sociedad desperately tried to rescue a point but Celta's defence held firm.

"Any suggestion that we let nerves get the better of us is wrong," said Sociedad coach Raynald Denoueix.

"We showed that mentally we were up to the task by the way we played in the second half, but we knew before the game that Celta were going to be a dangerous adversary and they deserved to win because they played very well."

Celta will finish the season in fourth place after reigning champions Valencia crashed 3-1 at home to Barcelona.

The Catalans were not distracted by furore surrounding their presidential elections and went ahead on the stroke of half time when Gaizka Mendietta scored from the penalty spot.

Patrick Kluivert and Marc Overmars added further goals late in the game for Barca before Juan Sanchez got a consolation goal for the home side.

Barca still have slim hopes of getting into the UEFA Cup but lie seventh, two points behind Athletic Bilbao who are in the final UEFA Cup slot after their 3-2 win over Champions League-bound Deportivo La Coruna.

The topsy-turvy match left Athletic coach Juup Heynckes completely bemused.

"This was one of those matches which shows that anything is possible in football," commented the German.

First half goals from Asier Del Horno and Francisco Yeste appeared to put Athletic on course for an easy win but Deportivo drew level with two goals in less than three minutes midway through the second half from Joan Capdevila and Sergio Gonzalez, before former Spanish international striker Ismael Urzaiz got a winner from close range.

Sevilla dropped out of the race for a place in Europe when they lost 3-2 at their Andalusian rivals Malaga.

TOP SIX

Spanish league table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Real	37	21	12	4	83	41	75
Sociedad	37	21	10	6	66	42	73
Deportivo	37	21	6	10	65	46	69
Celta	37	17	10	10	45	34	61
Valencia	37	16	9	12	53	35	57
Bilbao	37	15	10	12	62	58	55

Five chase Ronaldinho



Football

AFP, London

Manchester United are among a group of five suitors chasing Paris Saint Germain's Ronaldinho, the Brazilian's agent claimed Sunday.

Roberto Assis told BBC Radio 5 Live: "I do not know where

Ronaldinho is going.

"There are five clubs - Manchester United, Real Madrid, Barcelona, AC Milan and Inter - and I do not know where he will be playing next season."

Assis, who is also Ronaldinho's brother, confirmed that he had been in touch with Old Trafford.

"I have spoken to Manchester, it's a club where I have good contact with Sir Alex Ferguson and I have a

good feeling," he said.

Despite speculation about the 23-year-old striker's future, his coach at PSG Vahid Halilhodzic insists he does not want to see him leaving the French capital side.

"I did not become the manager-coach to separate myself from Ronaldinho," the former Rennes coach has said.